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ABSTRACT

A project was conducted to develop and disseminate a set of standards for excellence common to business education programs and to define instructional standards for excellence common to information processing. The following five procedural phases were used over an 18-month period to develop the standards: completion of a comprehensive literature review, preparation of standards statements drawing upon the literature and emerging practice in business and industry, validation of the standards through regional conferences and a mail survey of professional business educators, preparation of the standards in a form for use, and formulation of recommendations for dissemination. Two hundred forty-seven program standards and 188 instructional standards were developed and disseminated through a nationally distributed news release; articles published in state, regional, and national professional periodicals; a brochure describing the project; and site visits to business, industry, and government agencies. (MN)

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STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

Executive Summary

Introduction

During the past decade, the Federal government, states, and local education agencies have made a major commitment to the improvement of public education. The competency-based education movement has been followed by an effort to ensure quality in publicly-administered vocational education programs. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education recognized the need for sound criteria to assess the major elements of vocational education. Accordingly, in 1977 it initiated a series of contracts to establish national standards for the appraisal of vocational education. The current project complements earlier Department of Education funded contracts that developed standards for vocational agribusiness, home economics, industrial arts, and trade and industrial education programs.

For over a century, business education has been an integral part of American education. Its emphasis on the preparation of persons for office and entrepreneurial employment has served our nation well; and its stress on education for and about business has been a significant and vital component of the curriculum of all schools. Now that the Information Age is transforming our way of life, business education must be in the forefront of these changes. Because business education cannot be viewed apart from

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the society in which it functions, the need is urgent for all business educators to re-evaluate all aspects of the field to ensure that the needs and demands for managers and technical workers will be met and that business education will continue to contribute to the general education of all citizens.

The impetus for the project has come from instructors, teacher educators, publishers, employers, and administrators concerned about the need to maintain viable and relevant programs. The importance of strong business education programs cannot be overemphasized in terms of their ultimate contribution to the solution of problems such as inflation, unemployment, consumer literacy, and deficit spending. Similarly, the shift toward an information-based labor market imposes a strong responsibility on business educatiors to update program content and resources.

Project Outcomes

The outcomes of the project are a composite set of qualitatively-drawn program standards for excellence common to business education programs and instructional standards for excellence common to information processing.

Project Activities/Procedures

Five procedural phases were used over an 18-month period to develop the standards. These included (1) a comprehensive review of the literature, (2) preparation of standards statements drawing upon the literature and emerging practice in business and industry, (3) validation of the standards through regional

conferences and a mailed survey of professional business educators, (4) preparation of the standards in a form for use, and (5) recommendations for dissemination.

Project Personnel

The project was directed by the Dean of the School of Technology at East Carolina University and selected members of the business education faculty at that institution. A national Technical Advisory Group, composed of nine members representing business and industry, education, professional associations, student groups, and individuals with expertise in information processing, assisted in many activities. Responsibilities of the Technical Advisory Group included monitoring, reviewing, and making recommendations with reference to the management and organization of the project, the status report, topical areas for standards, format of standards, draft standards, validation plan, and products. They also assisted in defining terms and identifying sources of literature, reviewing consolidated standards, identifying special populations for visibility of the standards, and making recommendations for dissemination.

A Local Advisory Group, serving at no cost to the project and composed of twelve individuals from North Carolina representing business, industry, government, and education, advised the staff on procedures and draft standards.

Four consultants, selected to represent the content and levels of business education, assisted the project staff in identifying the content, organization, and format of the standards.

Phase 1: Review and Analysis of Literature

The first phase of the project focused on an intensive review of literature which provided the framework for determining what the standards should be, in the opinion of leaders in the profession, business, and industry. To provide a guide for effectively and efficiently reviewing the literature, the staff developed a tentative list of topical areas related to business education program standards and to information processing instructional standards which emphasized word and data processing. These tentative lists of topics provided an organizational structure which ensured that all aspects of program and information processing instruction were treated. The actual format and final listing of topics evolved during the development of standards.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature, the project staff communicated extensively with business educators at all levels nationwide to request identification and/or copies of both published and unpublished documents. Computer searches included ERIC, GPO, INSPEC, ABI/INFORM, as well as business and trade and industry data bases. Publications were reviewed from those identified in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature; and the Education Index.

Additional reviews included standards developed by the various states and the national projects in vocational agriculture, industrial arts, and home economics; publications of professional associations such as the Administrative Management Society, Association of Information Systems Professionals,

National Business Education Association, and Office Systems Research Association; and documents developed by state, regional, and national accrediting associations.

Throughout the literature review process, program standards and information processing instructional standards, whether stated or implied, were recorded along with the source identification and tentative standards topical area. Additional topical areas were also identified. Findings were summarized in a Status Report which was submitted to the Project Officer, Department of Education.

Phase 2: Preparation of Draft Standards

During the second quarter of the project, the project staff embarked upon an intensive effort to identify and develop a conclusive set of program standards for business education and instructional standards for information processing. Having reviewed the literature in the field extensively, staff members drafted a set of tentative standards statements common to business education programs and tentative instructional standards common to information processing. The draft standards were submitted to the project consultants for review and revision.

The standards statements that evolved during the meeting with the consultants in Chicago provided the framework for the development and modification of the standards.

To verify and supplement the findings from the literature, the project staff visited selected business, governmental, and industrial firms with information/data/word processing

installations. Information gained from the visits and the meetings with employers were incorporated into the pool of standards statements generated from the literature.

Consideration of format precipitated discussion of whether the program standards and the instructional standards should be presented as two separate documents or as a combined document. On the basis of specifications of the RFP and the recommendations of the Technical Advisory Group, the decision was made that the final instrument should consist of a single document with two different sections.

Throughout the development of the standards statements phase of the project, staff members were aware of the need to develop appropriate standards for both the secondary and postsecondary/adult levels. Members of the project staff met with the program coordinator for business occupations, North Carolina Department of Community Colleges, and two community college faculty members for a review of the draft copy of standards statements as they relate to postsecondary/adult needs.

After the draft copy of the standards statements had been reviewed and revised by the consultants, Technical Advisory Group, and Local Advisory Group, the project staff consolidated, edited, and rewrote the statements that summarized current thinking and research findings as reported in the literature, as observed in a business environment, and as reacted to by members of the advisory groups.

For validation purposes, two standards documents were prepared--one for validation of the program standards and one for

validation of the instructional standards. The use of two separate documents at this stage enabled the project staff to capitalize on the expertise of the participants during the validation process.

Phase 3: Validation of Standards

A validation plan was designed to assure that the program standards and the instructional standards reflect a consensus of the best thinking of educators. It was also designed to assure participation of individuals from wide geographic areas representing different educational levels.

Two methods were used to validate the standards statements: (1) Validation Workshops and (2) Mail Survey. Validation workshops were conducted under the aegis of the National Business Education Association at the following national and regional meetings: Eastern Business Education Association, Southern Business Education Association, Delta Pi Epsilon National Research Conference, and the American Vocational Association. Invitations to participate in the validation procedures were extended to business educators, through brochures, professional meetings, and professional journals.

The National Business Education Association, in cooperation with state supervisors of business education, arranged and conducted a validation through a mailed survey. The validation instruments were mailed to eight secondary and postsecondary/adult teachers and business education supervisors from each state. A total of 366 people (workshops and mail survey) reviewed the

business education program standards statements, and a total of 378 reviewed the information processing instructional standards.

For each statement, validators responded to the question: Is the standard important? by marking "Yes," "No," or "Unsure" to the right of each statement. Space was provided immediately following each standard statement for comments regarding appropriateness of the standard, changes in wording, and/or suggestions for new standards. Statements which did not receive a 68 percent endorsement were eliminated from the standards.

Phase 4: Preparation of Standards In Usable Form

Throughout the term of the project, staff members were cognizant of the need to organize and format the consolidated standards of excellence and other accompanying documents in a manner that would facilitate their use by business educators, administrators, supervisors, and teacher educators. The project staff worked closely with the Executive Director of the National Business Education Association, who was responsible for preparing a camera-ready copy of the composite standards and accompanying pages.

The final document is a composite set of generic standards consisting of two subsets--one for program standards and one for instructional standards in information processing. A product information sheet containing a description of the process and product involved in the standards project is also included. The consolidated standards contain sections entitled Acknowledgements, Background Information (describing the rationale for pre-

paring the standards), Development of the Standards (describing the procedures followed in preparing the standards), Dissemination and Instructions for Using the Standards for Program Assessment and Improvement.

The use of the final document is facilitated by the organization of the two sets of standards, a simplified form for responding to the standards statements, and a suggested procedure for identifying and correcting specific deficiencies. The two sets of standards can be used to evaluate the total business education program, the information processing instructional program, or both.

The Program Standards are organized into nine topic areas as follows: Philosophy and Purpose, Organization and Administration, Curriculum and Instruction, Instructional Staff, Financial Resources, Instructional Support Systems, Public Relations, Student Development Services, and Evaluation. The six topic areas comprising the Information Processing Instructional Standards are Organization, Content, Related Content, Methods and Resources, Instructional Support Systems, and Evaluation.

There are 247 program standards and 188 instructional standards. For each standard statement, the respondent simply indicates whether the program being evaluated exceeds a particular standard, meets the standard, or falls below the standard. The same procedure is followed in evaluating the information processing instructional component of the program. Space is provided at the end of each topic area for tallying the total number of standards met or exceeded and the total number of

standards on which a program fell below the standard.

Through the use of a Deficiency Identification and Correction Report, a simplified plan for identifying and reporting the correction of certain deficiencies can be followed. The use of this deficiency report enables anyone to interpret and make use of the evaluation results, which should ultimately result in better quality business education and information processing.

Phase 5: Dissemination of Standards

The standards will be available through the ERIC system. They will also be published by NBEA and made available on a cost-recovery basis. The Technical Advisory Group, at its first meeting in February 1984, recommended that the project staff focus attention on Phase 5 throughout the entire standards development process. The best dissemination plan, they noted, could be a failure if business educators and representatives from business and industry were not receptive to the standards.

Thus, recognizing the importance of acceptance by teachers, administrators, employers, and accrediting associations, the staff developed plans for effecting liaison with these relevant publics. Media were designed to acquaint these publics with the project and to involve them in the project.

These activities include:

1. A nationally distributed news release;
2. Articles published in state, regional, and national professional periodicals;
3. Brochure describing the project; and

4. Site visits to business, industry, and government agencies.

Specialized groups such as state directors of vocational education, state supervisors of business education, community college business department faculty, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, and regional accrediting associations were informed about the project.

It is recommended that all these interested persons and agencies be notified as soon as possible that the project is completed and that each be sent copies of the Product Information Sheet describing the project and telling exactly how and where copies of the standards can be obtained.

Printing and Dissemination Conference

The Project Director and Associate Director met with the Project Officer, U. S. Department of Education, and Branch Chief, Printing Branch, to discuss printing and dissemination of the standards. The Project Officer identified agencies and individuals which should receive copies of the standards document submitted to the U. S. Department of Education. The remaining copies were retained by the Project Director to be made available to individuals and agencies which would be most likely to influence their use.

It was determined that the final document will be in the public domain without copyright. Because of its involvement in the project, the National Business Education Association was identified as the agency to distribute further copies on a cost-recovery basis to members of the profession.

Use of the Standards

The standards were designed for use by business teachers, school or system-level administrators and business educators, and district/state level business educators for program planning purposes. They may be used by accrediting associations as guides for preparing instruments to be used in the evaluation of business programs for accreditation.

Through use of the standards, strengths and weaknesses of programs and instruction in information processing can be easily detected.

The standards should be useful in planning, revising, and updating courses and programs. Teacher educators should acquaint pre- and inservice teachers with the standards by incorporating them into professional education courses.

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendation is made that the standards be coded using a data base and that the business education program standards and the instructional standards for information processing be recorded on separate disks. The objective would be to make the standards more readily adaptable to any particular institution's needs. A user could screen, edit, delete, or add standards statements--easily developing a tailor-made set of standards for local use.

Business educators must be made aware of the value of the standards as a tool for assessing and improving information processing and business education programs. To achieve this awareness, it is recommended that a national dissemination plan

for the standards be developed and implemented. Workshops should be conducted at national, regional, and state level business education association conventions. Additional recommendations include the following:

- o A plan should be developed for following up the dissemination and extent of use made of the standards.
- o The standards should be expanded and adapted for use for accreditation purposes.
- o The standards should be utilized by the NBEA Task Force on Curriculum Development, K-14, and by the NBEA Task Force on Business Teacher Education.
- o A guide should be written to assist business teachers, state supervisors, and administrators in developing appropriate business education and information processing standards for special needs populations.
- o A plan should be designed to work through state departments of education to develop alternative strategies to implement the standards.
- o A plan for systematic revision of the standards should be prepared.